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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7382
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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5406
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1758
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, AUGUST 24, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turkish Participation in the Peacekeeping Force

All papers: Foreign Ministry spokesman Namik Tan signaled yesterday Turkey's readiness to send troops to the international force in Lebanon by saying that Ankara is making final detailed evaluations to minimize risks for its soldiers to be deployed in Lebanon, while the government is also waiting for the UN to clarify rules of engagement. Tan reiterated that Turkey will not send any troops to Lebanon if the international peace keeping force is given the task of disarming Hezbollah. Tan noted that Turkey will send troops only for humanitarian purposes and for reconstruction of Lebanon's infrastructure. Bugun and other papers report that Turkey sent an advance team to Lebanon to investigate the working conditions for the troops.

In Islamist-oriented Zaman columnist Huseyin Gulerce advised the Turkish government to focus on the goal of EU accession instead of contributions to the Lebanon peacekeeping force. Stressing that Turkey should become a part of European family first in order to succeed with its Middle East goals, the writer says: "Turkey should not be a part of projects that were prepared by others. It is the US, Israel, Iran and Syria who turned the Middle East into a bonfire and now through the UN they are asking Turkey to serve as a firefighter. The responsible ones for the current situation in Lebanon should also be able to find a solution. The Turkish government should immediately turn its face to the EU and start making new initiatives for the membership process."

Advising Turkey to play an active role in Lebanon, columnist Cuneyt Ulsever writes in mainstream Hurriyet: "Turkey cannot stay aloof to the ongoing fire in Middle East. Otherwise the fire will hit Turkey eventually. Having the unique characteristics of being a democratic and secular Muslim country, Turkey has a lot to offer to the Middle East region - something which will not be suitable to Hamas,

Hezbollah and other radical fundamentalist organizations. Turkey's own interests require it to assume an active role in Lebanon."

Turkish Middle East Diplomacy

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Namik Tan did not deny media reports that the Prime Minister's Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu met with Hamas leader Meshal during Gul's visit to Syria. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul's secret meeting with the families of abducted Israeli soldiers during his visit to Israel last weekend has sparked a domestic debate. Tan said yesterday that at the request of Israeli Foreign Ministry officials, the meeting was kept secret and held at Gul's hotel and it was not planned beforehand.

PKK Meets the Press

Hurriyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Vatan, Milliyet: Papers reports that the PKK arranged a press conference in Kandil Mountains to announce its reactions to the US Administration's call to the PKK to lay down its arms. International news agencies AFP and AP, together with Al Jazeera TV and Milliyet newspaper from Turkey attended the press conference. Cumhuriyet, citing a Turkish Intelligence Organization (MIT) report as its source, claims that Washington has been bargaining with the PKK to convince the terror organization to lay down its arms and begin negotiations. The report, prepared by MIT and submitted to the National Security Council (NSC) during their meeting last Monday, says the PKK responded to the US call to lay arms down by saying that "Turkey will never sit at the table with us after the last 20 years of conflict." The MIT report also highlights that the US will not harm the terror organization after establishing such close contacts and that the PKK has free rein in Iraq.

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TV Highlights

NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

Q Outgoing TGS Chief Hilmi Ozkok visited leading opposition party CHP headquarters to bid farewell to party leader Deniz Baykal

Q Three PKK supporters have been taken to custody in connection with forest fires in Mugla and 5 PKK terrorists give up themselves to the security forces in Sirnak

Q PM Erdogan starts a campaign for public donations for humanitarian support to Lebanon

International News

Q US State Department deputy spokesman Gallegos said that Iran's response to UN proposal falls short

Q Amnesty International accuses Israel of deliberate destruction of Lebanese civilian infrastructure

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